DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 220 844 CS 207 166

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TITLE The Effects of Training in Writing as a Process on Teacher Attitudes toward Language.
PUB DATE [79]
NOTE 11p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attitude Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Language Attitudes; *Teacher Attitudes; Teachers; Workshops; *Writing (Composition); Writing Instruction; *Writing Processes; *Writing Research

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine whether or not training in teaching writing with a process approach might change teacher attitudes toward language in a direction more consistent with linguists' recognition of the dependence of language on its appropriateness to the writer's purpose. Subjects were 79 writing teachers, elementary through college, participating in one of three writing process workshops that followed the format established by the Bay Area Writing Project. Subjects were given a pretest one month prior to the workshop and a posttest on its final day. "Language Inquiry," an inventory of attitudes toward language, was selected to assess the attitudes of the participants. In developing this instrument, the author used the judgments of ten linguists to rate the appropriate response for each item. The linguists' ratings were the standard against which respondents' answers were measured. The results of the study indicated that the subjects did change their attitudes toward language to be more congruent with those of linguists, but only modestly. After completing the workshop, the writing teachers were still much less usage-dependent and descriptive in attitudes than are linguists. The results did not support the assumption that elementary and middle school teachers were more apt to change their attitudes toward language than secondary and postsecondary teachers, since there were no significant differences between groups. (HTH)

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The Effects of Training in Writing as a Process on Teacher Attitudes Toward Language

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'The more rules of language a student can state the better writer she will be. Do you agree or disagree?

'Metaphors are used mainly in literary English. Agree or disagree?

'Any essays except the most informal must be written from the third person objective point of view. Agree or disagree?

From Frogner's "Language Inquiry"

Most contemporary linguists, recognizing language as descriptive and dependent on the appropriateness of the language to the writer's specific purpose, would disagree with these statements concerning language and language teaching. So would those who believe in teaching writing according to a process rather than a product oriented approach. However, most high school English teachers, who tend to be prescriptive, rule-bound and biased toward traditional linguistic behavior, would probably be in agreement with the statements. Lee (1978), studying the descriptive versus prescriptive language attitudes of secondary school English Department chairpersons and staff members in relation to those of practicing linguists, found that the language attitudes held by chairpersons and staff members differed significantly from linguists. While the linguists gave strong endorsement to language tenets that characterize linguistically informed attitudes, the chairpersons and staff members gave only mild endorsement to the tenets. Thus, one might infer that teachers are essentially prescriptive in their attitudes toward language, an orientation that is incompatible with teaching writing as a

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process.

Writing as a process is concerned with the various acts in which the writer engages in discovering and shaping meaning in composing a written piece. As Murray (1968) contends, there are no absolute laws of composition; each principle of writing may be broken to solve a particular problem in a specific piece of work, e.g., splitting an infinitive to provide emphasis. This process approach to writing and to teaching writing is generally congruent with the attitudes of linguists.

Gere and Smith (1979) believe that the route to better language teaching lies in serious attention to attitudes. Teacher attitudes need to be changed from a dependence on rules to a recognition of usage as a criterion for determining appropriateness in language. If the National Writing Project, which emphasizes writing as a process, is to have a strong impact on improving student writing performance, then such a change in attitude will need to be a major outcome of its training workshops and staff development programs.

This study was intended to ascertain whether or not training in teaching writing according to a process approach might also change teacher attitudes toward language in a direction more consistent with contemporary linguistic opinion. The investigation seemed especially relevant since studies pertaining to this issue have not been reported in the literature and secondly, because the heuristic qualities of composing tend to influence perceptions of language use. That is, engaging in the processes of drafting and revising a piece of writing invariably results in an examination of grammatical forms, conventions, syntax and the concepts that affect attitudes toward language. Specifically, the following two questions were investigated:

1) Do inservice teachers significantly change their attitudes toward language after completing a workshop in teaching writing as a process?
2) Are participating teachers representing elementary/middle school more or less likely to change significantly their attitudes toward language than those representing secondary/postsecondary grade levels?

Method

The subjects for this study were 79 writing teachers, elementary through college, in metropolitan Atlanta schools and colleges. The subjects ranged in age from 25 to 55 and were predominantly white females. Thirty-eight of the subjects were elementary/middle school teachers, while 41 were secondary/post-secondary teachers. These teachers participated in one of three writing workshops held during three consecutive summers at the Georgia State University/Southeast Center for the Teaching of Writing (GSU/SCTW). The workshops were comprised respectively of 24, 40, and 15 teachers. One missing pretest score in the first workshop reduced the total number of subjects for this study to 78.

The format of all three workshops followed the pattern established by the University of California, Berkeley/Bay Area Writing Project (1977):

1. The workshop runs for five weeks, four days per week, and includes one social event each week.
2. The morning sessions were planned around the presentations of the participants. There are usually two presentations each morning with time for discussion following each. Staff members determine the order of presentations and help participants prepare their presentations. Topics

vary, depending on the interests, needs and knowledge of the participants. Topics not covered by the participants are addressed by the staff and outside consultants in some afternoon sessions. These include attention to at least the following subjects, which are considered basic for successful writing instruction: the composing process, syntax, sequencing, student writing, small group techniques and writing assessment.

3. The writing required of participants falls into four broad categories:
   a. writing as a part of the participant presentations,
   b. writing in response to staff assignments, ranging from personal to analytical,
   c. a personal position paper on writing and the teaching of writing,
   d. a curriculum project that participants prepare during the following academic year (not required at GSU/SCIW).

Procedure

Subjects were administered a pretest approximately one month prior to attending the workshop and a posttest on the final day of the workshop. Language Inquiry, an inventory of attitudes toward language was selected to assess the attitudes of the participants (Frogner, 1969). The instrument covers a range of topics related to language, but the dominant focus is on standards in using American English and on language study and teaching. The content is especially significant to English teachers.

In developing the Language Inquiry, Frogner used the judgments of ten linguists from Illinois universities and colleges to determine the selection of the 100 items comprising the final form of the instrument and to rate the appropriate response for each item. A four-point rating scale ranging from agree to disagree was used to determine the appropriate response. Only items which were rated the same on the four-point scale by at least seven of the ten linguists were included in the final version of the instrument. No norms have been established for its use.

For this study the linguists' ratings were the standard against which respondents' answers were measured. An item was scored correct if a participant's response matched the predominant linguists' response for that item. Otherwise, it was considered incorrect. Thus, scores could range from 0 to 100.

Results

In order to answer the research questions stated in the introduction, a three-way repeated measures analysis of variance was performed. Year (1, 2 or 3) and level (elementary/middle or secondary/postsecondary) served as the between-subjects factors while time of testing (pretest-posttest) was the within-subjects factor. As previously described, the Language Inquiry served as the dependent variable in this study. Pretest means, posttest means, and standard deviations for the six groups are presented in Table 1.

INSERT TABLES 1 AND 2 ABOUT HERE

Results of the analysis of variance are summarized in Table 2. The only significant main effect in this analysis was that for time of testing (pretest-posttest). Inspection of these two means reveals that the posttest mean, 49.47, was significantly greater than the pretest mean, 40.74. None of the interaction

effects in the analysis was significant.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate the subjects changed their attitudes toward language to be more congruent with the attitudes held by linguists. Although this change was significant statistically, it represented only a modest gain toward matching the attitudes of the linguists. After completing the workshop, the writing teachers were still much less usage-dependent and descriptive in the attitudes than are linguists, falling only at the midpoint of the prescriptive-descriptive continuum. (See Table 3.)

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Although the design of this study precludes inferring a cause-effect relationship, it seems very unlikely that workshop training in teaching writing as a process can produce attitudes which are reasonably congruent with those of linguists and which are needed to effectively teach writing as a process. Thus, teachers taking this training will gain access to a repertoire of methods but will probably lack attitudes which are sufficiently usage-dependent and descriptive to whole-heartedly endorse and utilize classroom practices that constitute a process approach to teaching writing.

At the outset of this study, it was assumed that elementary and middle school teachers were more apt to change their attitudes toward language than secondary and postsecondary teachers. This assumption did not prove true since all groups changed their attitudes with no significant differences between groups. Therefore, the power of the workshop training to influence teachers at all levels of schooling appears evident, but the practical significance of that change is not adequate to fully implement a process approach to teaching writing.

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Table 1

Language Inquiry Pretest and Posttest Means and Standard Deviations

Group		N	Pretest		Posttest	
			$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD
YEAR 1	E - M	11	40.18	13.39	43.55	17.91
	S - PS	12	42.58	13.96	53.58	19.58
YEAR 2	E - M	22	38.82	20.49	47.18	22.25
	S - PS	18	45.83	14.05	54.39	21.51
YEAR 3	E - M	4	36.25	24.68	53.25	18.84
	S - PS	11	36.45	16.68	46.09	21.92

E - M = Elementary/Middle School Subjects combined

S - PS = Secondary/Post-secondary Subjects combined

Table 2

Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance for Language Inquiry Scores

Source of Variation	df	SS	MS	F
Between Subjects	77			
YEAR (Y)	2	246.30	123.15	0.19
LEVEL (L)	1	315.15	315.15	0.50
Y X L	2	525.93	262.97	0.41
Error (B)	72	45815.34	636.31	
Within Subjects	78			
Time of Testing (P)	1	2722.20	2722.20	30.32*
P X Y	2	152.07	76.04	0.85
P X L	1	0.18	0.18	0.00
P X Y X L	2	231.38	115.69	1.29
Error (W)	72	6464.31	89.78	
Total	155			

* $p < .001$

Table 3

Congruence of Teacher Attitudes Toward Language with Those of Linguists